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EB/TRA THOMAS ENGLE AND NEA/ARP DAVID BERNIS

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SUBJECT: KUWAIT GIVES GREEN LIGHT ON OPEN SKIES

REF: KUWAIT 996

1. (SBU) On April 4, CDA and Econoff met with Deputy Director of Civil Aviation for Aviation Safety and Air Transport Affairs Fawaz Al-Farah to follow up on the ongoing Open Skies discussions. The meeting was prompted by a letter to the Ambassador from Minister of Communications Dr. Ismail Al-Shatti (Ref A) that indicated GOK willingness to conclude an Open Skies agreement (OSA).

2. (SBU) During the meeting, Al-Farah said he told PM Shaykh Nasser Al-Mohammed Al-Sabah on March 12 that all that was needed to conclude an OSA was an exemption for U.S. carriers to the contracted duopoly on ground-handling services that now exists. (Note: Kuwait Airways and National Aviation Services are currently the only authorized ground-handling agents. End note.) Al-Farah stated that, at a Council of Ministers meeting on March 19, the Council agreed "in principle" to an OSA and subsequently issued a decree authorizing the exemption for U.S. carriers. This exemption removes the sole remaining obstacle - the right to self-ground handle - to an OSA.

3. (SBU) The CDA reiterated the USG's readiness to conclude the OSA immediately. Al-Farah stated that he will meet with Commerce Ministry officials on April 12 to consult about an OSA's relationship to the ongoing TIFA process, but that he sees no further obstacles to signing the agreement.

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